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SUBJECT: MINISTER OF AWQAF APPRECIATES OUTREACH, SEEKS
EXPANDED COOPERATION

Summary

1. (U) Oman's Minister of Awqaf expressed his appreciation for recent U.S. military outreach efforts involving an exchange of visits. He noted that such cultural dialogue benefits both countries and advances mutual goals of promoting tolerance. In the context of Muscat as "Cultural Capital of the Arab World," the Ministry also plans to host marquee U.S. expert speakers throughout its Ramadan programming. End Summary.

Cooperation

2. (U) DCM (then Charge) in a June 14 call on Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs Abdullah al-Salimi delivered a letter of thanks from the Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy in return for a gift the Minister had sent to the Superintendent via Dr. Brandon Wheeler, an expert on Islam at the Academy. The Minister expressed his appreciation for the special relationship between the Ministry and the Embassy, remarking on the USG's "sincere intentions" in dealing with the Sultanate, especially in the area of promoting and supporting cultural exchanges. He said such exchanges benefit the international atmosphere and promote valuable initiatives in cultural, religious, and political fields. The Minister expressed gratitude to the Embassy for helping organize his own recent trip to the U.S., calling it a fruitful visit that will lead to deeper cooperation and relations between Oman and the U.S.

Promoting A Culture of Tolerance

3. (SBU) The Minister also cited the recent visit of a group of USCENTCOM chaplains who facilitated a successful exchange of views. Such dialogue is valuable to the Sultanate, he stressed, because "the relationship is not as productive if one side only receives ideas from the other." The Minister said discussions with American experts familiar with Muslim culture are particularly useful in advancing the mutual goal of building a community of tolerance, understanding, and respect. He said that the ministry looks forward to expanding such discussions.

Opposites Attract

4. (SBU) When asked why other Islamic states do not look more to Oman as a model of religious tolerance, the Minister replied that, paradoxically, "too many similarities often lead to misunderstandings." Referring to the idea of a "clash of civilizations," he opined that, whereas Christian and Muslim cultures in the Mediterranean basin who share many similarities often clash, states like China and India remain peacefully coexistent precisely because of their cultural dissimilarities. Nonetheless, the only sure way to peace and stability is through dialogue.

Ramadan Program to Feature Top U.S. Speakers

5. (U) UNESCO declared Muscat the cultural capital of the Arab world for 2005/06. With that in mind, the Ministry will sponsor a photo exhibit on Islam and the Quran during Ramadan at the Grand Mosque. Additionally, the Ministry is organizing activities in conjunction with the U.S. Institute of American Values, and other workshops and activities to commemorate the cultural year. He noted that the Ministry annually organizes a Ramadan lecture series featuring prominent foreign guest speakers, which in the past has included such notables as Bernard Lewis. This year's program, the Minister said, will include such American heavyweights as Samuel Huntington, Francis Fukuyama, and

Thomas Friedman.
GRAPPO